**Proposal to Nominate**

**Mortuary Station**

**as an**

**Item of Engineering Heritage Interest**

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| **Item Name:** | **Mortuary Station** | | | | | |
| **Other/Former Names:** | Regent Street Railway Station | | | | | |
| **Locality:** | Chippendale | | | | | |
| **Address:** | Regent Street, Chippendale NSW 2008 | | | | | |
| **Co-ordinates** | Lat: -33.886473877592344 Lon: 151.20223853129596. | | | | | |
| **Current Owner:** | Transport Asset Holding Entity (TAHE) - Sydney Trains | | | | |
| **Original Owner:** | New South Wales Government Railways | | | | |
| **Current use:** | Disused | | | | |
| **Former use:** | Embarkation station for coffins and mourners for transport to Haslem’s Creek – later Rookwood, cemetery. | | | | |
| **Proposed use:** | Undetermined | | | | |
| **Item Condition:** | Excellent | | | | |
| **Designer:** | [James Barnet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Barnet), Colonial Architect | | | | |
| **Builder:** | Stoddart & Medways | | | | |
| **Started:** | 1868 | **Completed:**  **Opened:** | | 22 March 1869  9 June 1869 | |
| **History:** | The first burial ground in the Colony of New South Wales was where Sydney Town Hall stands today. It was closed in 1820 and a new burial ground was established at a site chosen by Governor Macquarie at the Brickfields; it became known as the Sandhills or Devonshire Street Cemetery. However, by the 1860s it was becoming full and there was agitation for a new cemetery. Eventually, with the Necropolis Act of 1867 a new site with railway access was established at Haslem’s Creek about 11 miles from Sydney. The new cemetery was created along the lines of the "gardenesque" Highgate Cemetery in London.  Two railway stations (known as ‘receiving houses’) were built for the funeral trains – the Mortuary Station at Sydney as the gateway to ‘the sleeping city’, and one in the centre of the (original 200 acre or 81 ha) cemetery at Haslem’s Creek. They were designed by Colonial Architect James Barnet in Gothic Revival style with elaborate funerary symbolism carved into their sandstone fabric. The Mortuary Station was opened in June 1869 and a dedicated branch line was constructed into the cemetery. The funeral trains carried not only caskets and mourners, but also those merely wishing to enjoy ‘the serene atmosphere of the cemetery’s landscaped beauty’.  As the original cemetery became full, its extent was expanded to become the largest Victorian cemetery in the world and the largest cemetery in the Southern Hemisphere, with four stations. When full, the original cemetery became neglected and the receiving house fell into disrepair.  With better roads and increased car ownership railway funerals were phased out and in 1938 the Mortuary Station ceased to be the terminus. While a funeral train service, restricted to weekends, was provided from Central Station, this ceased in April 1948 and the branch lines were closed down.  In 1957 the Rookwood receiving house was sold for £100, dismantled and re-erected in Canberra where it is now All Saints Church, Ainslie; it is on the ACT Heritage Register.  From 14 March 1938, Mortuary Station was used for the consignment of horses and dogs, and its name was changed to Regent Street Station. From February 1950 it was used as a parcels dispatch, at which time catenary wires were placed inside the rail pavilion and the easternmost trefoil arches at either end were removed to allow for the passage of larger rail vehicles.  In 1981 David Hill, Chief Executive of the State Rail Authority announced the Mortuary Station would be restored, and work commenced c.1983. Restoration was coordinated by the Way and Works Branch of State Rail, and Gledhill Constructions made repairs and renewals under the direction of Lester Firth and Associates as project architects; the overhead electrical wires were removed c.1960.  For a time, the station was leased as a pancake restaurant; it is now managed and maintained by Sydney Trains for special events, exhibitions, tours filming and photography.  The Mortuary Station is on the NSW State Heritage Register as part of the Sydney Terminal & Central Station Group, and is on the Railcorp Register under Section 170, NSW Heritage Act. | | | | |
| **Description:** | The building is of sandstone with two varieties of colour being used - brown for all columns, cornices etc., and white for the plain surfaces. It consists of a long low-roofed pavilion of nine bays covering a single railway track that enters and leaves through a wide Gothic arch at either end. A second arch at either end provides access to the raised stone platform that occupies half the sheltered area.  An octagonal pavilion of open arches serves as a port cochere on the street side of the platform; its steeply pitched roof resolves into a delicate fleche, which rises above the rest of the building to give the station a landmark character. The outer wall of the platform pavilion (on the eastern side of the railway track) is composed of nine great arches on banded cylindrical columns with leafy capitals. The columns rise from square tapered bases, each a huge block as high as the human figure. At the corners of the pavilion, the arches rest on squared piers that are twice the bulk of the columns. The piers have enriched string courses with stiff-leaf detail like the column capitals. The spandrels between the arches contain circular medallions with carved centre.  The walls are of plain ashlar courses, rising to a highly ornamented corbel table with a high-pitched roof rising into a square fleche set on the diagonal, which acts as a bell turret. The balance of the arches and strong cornice-line with the sweep of the roof makes for a great architecture. In the angles between the octagonal porch and the station pavilion are set the less formal structures of rest rooms and toilets. Funeral motives are carved into the sandstone fabric.  The platform is of sandstone with a tile surface. About one third of the length of the platform has been lost by way of encroachment from the neighbouring bus terminal.  The gardens surrounding the station were reinstated c.1980. They include a manicured lawn, decorative flowering shrubs and box hedges. The entire site is enclosed by a fine sandstone and iron palisade fence with decorative gate posts. *(Adapted from the SHR*). | | | | |
| **Significance:** | Mortuary Station is significant:   * As one of a pair of purpose built mortuary or receiving stations, the only known example in Australasia. Whilst the station at Sydney remains in its original location, the Rookwood Station has been relocated; * As a fine, rare example of 19th century Venetian Gothic; * As the finest example of a covered single platform type station in Australia and the most elaborately detailed stations, of its period. The detail includes a rare example of a tiled platform, elaborately carved stonework and joinery, furniture and decorative wrought iron work; * As one of few Gothic Revival buildings designed by the Colonial Architect James Barnet, a highly praised design, marking a high point in his career and considered to be one of his finest designs; * For its association with Victorian rituals surrounding death and mourning. The building was designed as an elaborate setting for the example of the use of trains rather than horse drawn carriages to transport coffins to cemeteries; * As one of few Gothic revival buildings of the period that were designed for a function other than for churches or schools. The style was selected to provide an appropriate atmosphere for the mourners; * As an early example of the introduction of Venetian Gothic motifs including the colonnade which screens the platform; * As a fine example of stone masonry including an arcade with foliated capitals and carved intrados (soffit), metal and wood work. * For the role played by the colonial Architect James Barnet in encouraging the art of stone masonry through his designs; * For its association with the development of the Rookwood Necropolis, one of the largest garden cemeteries in the world; (SHR); * As evidence of the fundamental role played by the railways in establishing Sydney’s largest cemetery. | | | | |
| **Webpage Summary:**  *(* | Mortuary Station was completed in 1869 as one of two railway stations purpose-built for funeral trains running between Sydney and the new Haslems Creek cemetery (now called Rookwood), at Lidcombe. This modern gardenesque" way of burying people was far distant from their local parishes,  Both railway stations were designed in the Gothic Revival style by the renowned NSW Colonial Architect James Barnet, with elaborate funerary symbolism carved into their sandstone fabric. They were very different in style from other railway architecture; these buildings aspired to the sombre ambience of a church, while also facilitating the efficient movement of mourners and caskets to the remote burying ground.  As the original cemetery became full, its extent was expanded to become the largest Victorian Cemetery in the World and the largest cemetery in the Southern Hemisphere, with four railway stations. When full, the original cemetery became neglected and the receiving house fell into disrepair.  With better roads and increased car ownership, railway funerals were phased out, and in 1938 the Mortuary Station ceased to be the terminus. While a funeral train service restricted to weekends was provided from Central Station, this ceased in April 1948 and the branch lines were closed.  In 1957 the Rookwood receiving house was sold for £100, dismantled and re-erected in Canberra where it is now All Saints Church, Ainslie; it is on the ACT Heritage Register.  Gradually, Mortuary Station fell into disrepair, but its heritage worth was recognised in 1981 and it was restored.  The Mortuary Station is evidence of the fundamental role played by the railways in establishing Sydney’s largest cemetery. It is on the NSW State Heritage Register as part of the Sydney Terminal & Central Station Group, and is on the Railcorp Register under Section 170, NSW Heritage Act. | | | | |
| **Engineering Theme:** | Transport, Rail, Stations | | | | |
| **Heritage Listing:** | * Sydney Terminal & Central Station Group: SHR listing No: 01255 * Railcorp Register: Section 170, NSW Heritage Act | | | | |
| **References/Sources:** | This nomination quotes extensively from information contained in some of the following sources:   * NSW State Heritage Register: <https://www.hms.heritage.nsw.gov.au/App/Item/ViewItem?itemId=4803219> * Transport Sydney Trains: Mortuary Station * *Mortuary Railway Station at Regent Street, Sydney*: A visit by members of the Australian Railway Historical Society, 15th April, 2015. * Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regent_Street_railway_station> * *The Sleeping City: The Story of Rookwood Necropolis.* Ed: David Weston. Pub: Society of Australian Geneaologists, and Hale & Iremonger. | | | | |
| **Nominated by:** | Michael Clarke | | | | |
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| **EHA Branch:** | Sydney | | **Nomination Date:** | | 12 March 2024 |

Note: All colour images are by Michael Clarke.

A building with a steeple and a lawn

Description automatically generated

People inside of a building with arches

Description automatically generatedA stone building with a cross on top

Description automatically generated

**Mortuary Station**

A close-up of a stone arch

Description automatically generatedA group of people standing in a train station

Description automatically generated

A stone pillar with floral carvings

Description automatically generated

A stone statue of a person praying

Description automatically generated

**Mortuary Station**

People sitting outside a building

Description automatically generated

A long shot of a train station

Description automatically generated

A wooden cart in a stone building

Description automatically generated

**Coffin trolley**

A close-up of a stone carving of a angel

Description automatically generatedA stone carving of a angel

Description automatically generated

**Funerary symbols**

**Time flies!**

A train going into a building

Description automatically generatedA stone church with a bell tower

Description automatically generated

**All Saints, Ainsley - with bell tower moved to the right-**

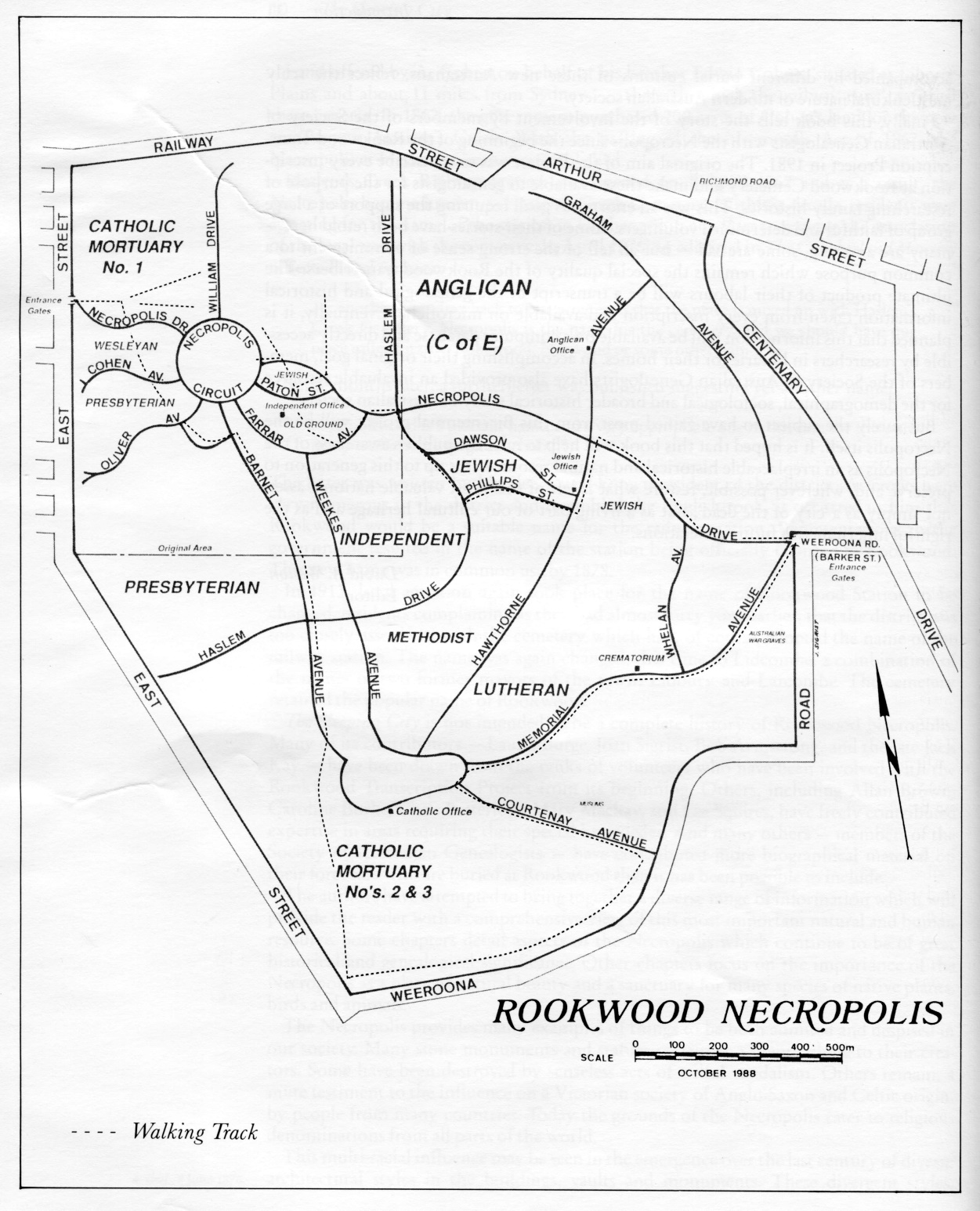
**Rookwood receiving house**

A stone arch with angels and a stained glass window

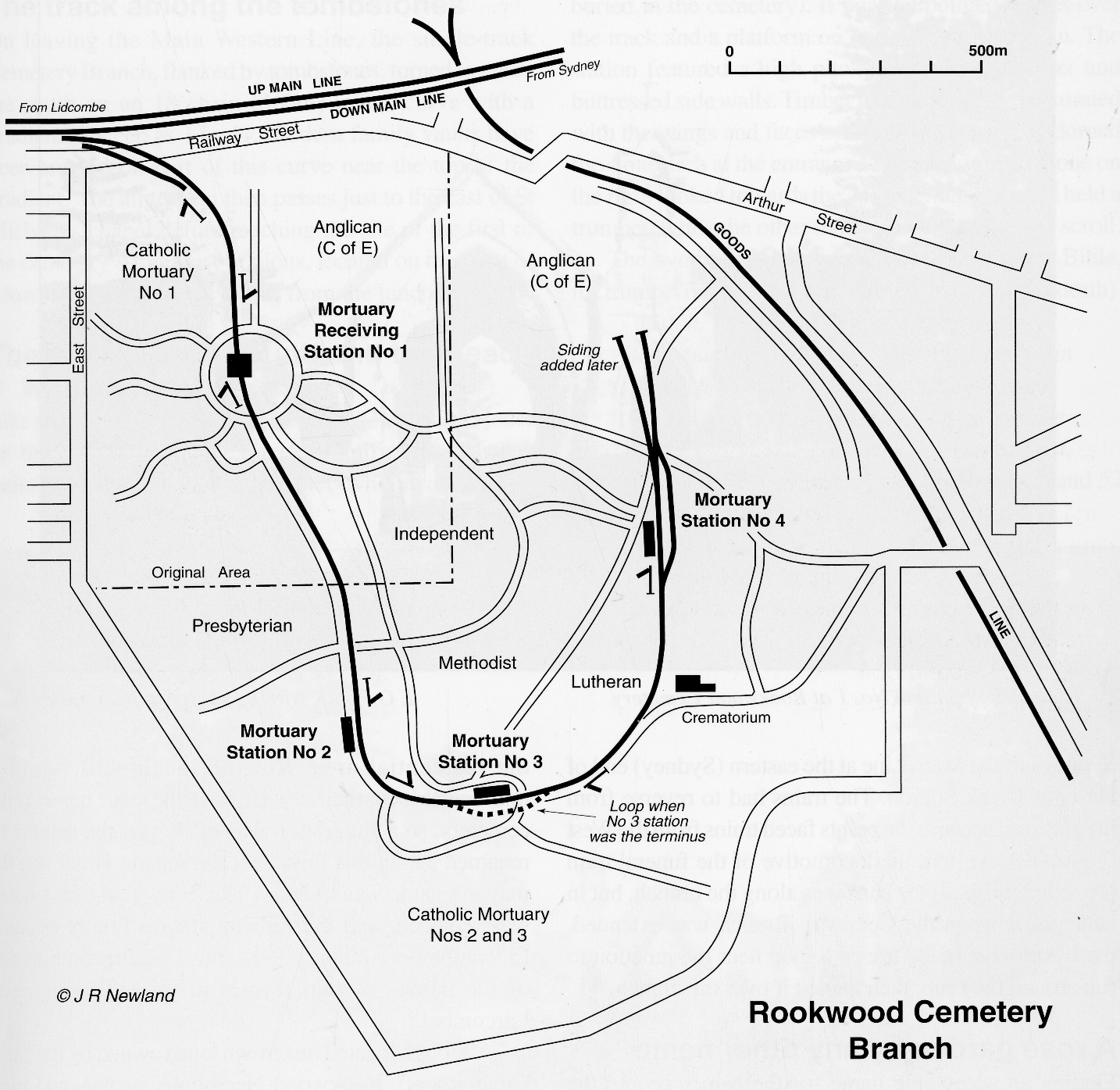
Description automatically generatedA wooden staircase in a building

Description automatically generated

**Interior, All Saints, Ainsley – with ‘angel arch’ moved to the entrance to the chancel**



Source: *The Sleeping City: The Story of Rookwood Necropolis.*



*Rookwood Cemetery railway lines and stations*